

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

IO-11 CPR-01 (ISO) W

----- 051496

R 200537Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5964

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0151

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD AND CORCORAN

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PDIP, MILI, LA, US

SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF DEFENSE RECEPTION FOR NON-COMMUNIST
CHIEFS OF MISSION ON ARMY DAY

SUMMARY: DATT (WHO IS REPORTING SEPARATELY) AND I WERE INCLUDED IN RESPECTIVE GROUP FUNCTIONS JANUARY 20 TO MARK 27TH ANNIVERSARY OF FOUNDING OF LAO PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY (LPLA). HOSTS WERE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GENERAL KHAMTAY SIPHANDONE AND CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL SISAVATH KEOBOUNPHAN. ATMOSPHERE WAS AT SAME TIME CORDIAL AND EXTREMELY AWKWARD. MOST INTERESTING ASPECT IS THAT U.S. REPRESENTATIVES CONTINUE TO BE INVITED TO SUCH FUNCTIONS WITHOUT APPARENT DIFFERENTIATION FROM REST OF DIPLOMATIC CORPS. END SUMMARY.

1. CHIEFS OF NON-COMMUNIST DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS IN VIENTIANE RECEIVED WORD ON JANUARY 19 -- IN AT LEAST ONE CASE NOT UNTIL EVENING -- THAT LPLA COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GENERAL KHAMTAY SIPHANDONE (CONCURRENTLY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER
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OF DEFENSE) WOULD "RECEIVE THEIR CONGRATULATIONS" ON OCCASION

OF 27TH ANNIVERSARY OF LPLA, JANUARY 20, FROM 0915 TO 1015 HOURS. AT SAME TIME MILITARY ATTACHE CORPS' APPOINTMENT WITH HIM, PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED FOR 1000, WAS SHIFTED TO 1115. WE ASSUME THERE WAS YET A THIRD FUNCTION FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION OF COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER IDEOLOGY OR SPACE LIMITATIONS DETERMINED THIS DIVISION INTO GROUPS, BUT THERE HAVE BEEN SIMILAR SPLIT-LEVEL EXERCISES AT MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

2. ACCORDINGLY, AMBASSADORS OF FRANCE, INDIA, JAPAN, THAILAND, AUSTRALIA AND U.K. AND CHARGES OF WEST GERMANY, U.S. AND INDONESIA ASSEMBLED IN LOBBY OF MINISTRY OF DEFENSE AND WERE ESCORTED ONE BY ONE INTO A RECEPTION ROOM TO SHAKE HANDS WITH KHAMTAY AND WITH CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL SISAVATH KEOBOUNPHAN (CONCURRENTLY MINISTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR MILITARY AFFAIRS). PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR, WHO WOULD HAVE FOLLOWED THE THAI IN ORDER OF PRECEDENCE, WAS 20 MINUTES LATE. MALAYSIAN CHARGE DID NOT ATTEND, AND THE ISRAELI WAS EITHER IN BANGKOK OR UNINVITED.

3. BOTH GENERALS GREETED ME IN LAO WITH WARM SMILES BUT MADE NO SUBSTANTIVE REMARKS (THERE WAS NO INTERPRETER NEARBY), AND I MADE SIMPLY RETURNED GREETINGS, AS DID THE NEW INDONESIAN CHARGE, THE ONLY COLLEAGUE WHOSE ENTRY I SAW.

4. ALL PROCEEDINGS WERE CONDUCTED IN LAO, WITH OFTEN-INAUDIBLE INTERPRETATION INTO FRENCH BY ATTACHE DE CABINET COLONEL DAMDOUANE PHOMDUANGSI. WE ROSE WHILE KHAMTAY PROPOSED A TOAST TO LPLA, ITS VICTORY AS PART OF AN ON BEHALF OF LAO PEOPLE, AND THE SUPPORT OF UNSPECIFIED FRIENDLY COUNTRIES. HE THEN CIRCULATED AROUND THE ROOM, TRAILED BY SISAVATH, TO CLINK GLASSES OF WARM CHAMPAGNE WITH EVERYONE.

5. AFTER SHORT BUT EMBARRASSING SILENCE, FRENCH AMBASSADOR GEORGES CARDI REPLIED ON BEHALF OF GUESTS WITH RESTRAINED CONGRATULATIONS TO LPLA AND EXPECTATION THAT ARMY WOULD NOW DEVOTE ITS EFFORTS TO NATION-BUILDING.

6. SEATED ONCE MORE, WE WERE SERVED LUKE-WARM TEA AND MORE OF THE FLAT CHAMPAGNE BY AN ENLISTED WOMAN IN ZORIS. KHAMTAY AND

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CARDI, WITH SOME HELP FROM JAPANESE, AUSTRALIAN AND BRITISH AMBASSADORS, ATTEMPTED TO SUSTAIN A GROUP CONVERSATION. THERE WERE NUMEROUS AWKWARD PAUSES. CONVERSATION CENTERED ON NATURE AND EXTENT OF ARMY DAY OBSERVANCES; WHETHER OR NOT LPLA USES DECORATIONS (YES, BUT THEY ARE WORN ONLY ON CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS -- ALTHOUGH NO ONE PRESENT WAS WEARING ANY); AND PROVINCES OF ORIGIN OF LPLA LEADERS (KHAMTAY SAID HE CAME FROM CHAMPASSAK, SISAVATH FROM SAN NEUA, AND SECSTATE KHAMMOUANE

BOUPHA -- THE ONLY OTHER MINDEF OFFICIAL PRESENT -- FROM LUANG PRABANG). THIS LAST POINT, KHAMTAY SAID, DEMONSTRATED THAT THE LPLA EMBRACED ALL REGIONS AND ALL ETHNIC GROUPS OF LAOS.

7. KHAMTAY, ALTHOUGH VISIBLY NERVOUS, WAS GENIAL THROUGHOUT AND SHOWED A KNACK FOR TURNING ALMOST EVERY EXCHANGE INTO A BRIEF PROPAGANDA TID-BIT BOOSTING THE LPLA. HE ALSO LAUNCHED A FEW SUBJECTS HIMSELF, E.G., "OFFICIALLY THIS IS ONLY OUR 27TH ANNIVERSARY, BUT IN FACT WE HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING FOR A FULL 30 YEARS."

8. THERE WAS GENERAL RELIF WHEN KHAMTAY SIGNLED AN END TO THE AUDIENCE, SOME 25 MINUTES AFTER THE TOASTS HAD BEGUN, AND THERE WAS ANOTHER ROUND OF CORDIAL HANDSHAKES ON THE WAY OUT.

9. COMMENT: DATT IS REPORTING SEPARATELY ON THE ATTACHE CALL. THIS OF COURSE IS FIRST TIME LPLA HAS CELEBRATED ITS ANNIVERSARY IN VIENTIANE AND A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF AMATEURISM IS UNDERSTANDABLE; EVEN SO, CEREMONIES WERE CLEARLY PUT TOGETHER ONLY AT LAST MINUTE. (FOREIGN MINISTRY PROTOCOL DIRECTORATE MAINTAINED UNTIL MID-AFTERNOON JANUARY 19 THAT JANUARY 20 WOULD BE HOLIDAY ONLY FOR ARMY AND POLICE, THEN CALLED TO SAY IT HAD JUST BEEN ANNOUNCED THAT HOLIDAY WOULD BE GOVERNMENT-WIDE AND TO SUGGEST THAT WE EXCUSE LOCAL EMPLOYEES, WHICH WE DID EXCEPT FOR THOSE IN ESSENTIAL JOBS.) IT IS INTERESTING THAT U.S. CONTINUES TO BE INCLUDED, AND OUR REPRESENTATIVES TREATED CORDIALLY, IN ALL OCCASIONS SUCH AS THIS AND IN ALL SERIES OF OFFICIAL CALLS TO WHICH OTHER NON-COMMUNIST DIPLOMATS AND ATTACHES ARE INVITED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY CEREMONIES, DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL, COMMERATIVE CELEBRATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976VIENTI00151
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: DG ALTERED
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760020-1164
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760139/aaaabhvr.tel
Line Count: 145
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 APR 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <13 AUG 2004 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MINISTRY OF DEFENSE RECEPTION FOR NON-COMMUNIST CHIEFS OF MISSION ON ARMY DAY
TAGS: PFOR, PDIP, MILI, LA, US, LPLA
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006